

KING ARTHUR AND HIS COURT



FRANCES
NIMMO
GREENE



THE BOY ARTHUR AND THE LADY OF THE LAKE

LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR AND HIS COURT

BY

FRANCES NIMMO GREENE

ILLUSTRATED WITH ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

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Affectionately Dedicated

TO

Eugene Lebert Brown

AND

Richard Clarke Foster



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PREFACE

THESE stories of King Arthur are re-told in the faith that chivalry in its highest sense is not dead among us; and that as long as Christian manhood survives, so long will the chivalric instinct be an important factor in it.

After a study of the many different versions of the legends, the author decided to follow that of Tennyson. The poet strips the stories of the barbarities found in the earlier writings on the subject, and brings to them the nobility of his own ideals. Sidney Lanier says: "We might fairly trace the growth of English civilization by comparing with the earliest conceptions of King Arthur the latest ideal of him in our literature given us by our own great master Tennyson."

Preface

In the reproduction of the stories, the words put in the mouths of the characters are, almost without exception, taken verbatim from the poet. If the author has succeeded in imbuing these pages with aught of the spirit of ideal knightliness, the inspiration also is due to the same great master.

FRANCES NIMMO GREENE.

MONTGOMERY, ALA.

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INTRODUCTORY

FEUDALISM AND CHIVALRY

DURING that period of the world's history known as the "Middle Ages," there existed in most of the nations of Europe a peculiar form of society called "Feudalism."

This system was distinguished by the great power exercised by the nobles: each lord or baron was like a petty king, owning great tracts of land and ruling all the people who dwelt thereon. Those who lived on the lands of a baron were called his "vassals" or "liegemen," and they were under oath to obey their liege lord in time of peace, and to follow him in time of war. Thus a baron, when he chose to fight, could summon his vassals round him and go out to battle leading a small army all his own.

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As the vassals swore allegiance to their lords, so the lords in turn swore allegiance to the king; and they were under oath to assemble their liegemen and go to the aid of the king whenever he was attacked by an enemy, or whenever he himself chose to begin a war.

It was a common occurrence during feudal times for one baron to make war on another in the same kingdom; and it was sometimes the case that a faithless lord would take up arms against even the king himself.

Now these powerful nobles built great castles of stone and fortified them so strongly that they were all but impregnable. They were usually built on high, steep places, and were surrounded by massive walls with openings protected by heavy iron gates. As a further means of protection, wide ditches or "moats" were sometimes dug around the outer walls, and flooded with water. There were drawbridges held up against the walls

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by chains, and these could be lowered to give passage across the moat. When any one desired admission to one of these strongholds, he would "wind" or blow his horn at the gate; the watchman in the tower that crowned the wall would survey the newcomer critically, and send an account of him to the lord of the castle, who decided whether or not the stranger should be admitted.

These were the times also in which men encased themselves and their horses in armor, and fought hand-to-hand with spears and swords and battleaxes.

Although a bad system in many respects, feudalism had its place in the advancement of civilization; for out of it sprang "Chivalry," that influence which, next to Christianity, has been the greatest factor in the development of true manhood.

Chivalry as an institution meant a certain system of knighthood. As a sentiment—or better still, an inspiration—it means a

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consecrated devotion to honor, courtesy, valor, gentleness, gallantry.

One of the principal features of Chivalry was the great honor and conspicuous gallantry accorded the female sex. The historian Hallam says that "the love of God and the ladies was enjoined as a single duty" on the aspirant to knighthood.

Customs of society generally spring from rational foundations, and the deference paid to women must surely have had its origin in the awakening of man to the fact that it is the part of the strong and valiant to protect, rather than to oppress, the weak.

THE TRAINING OF A KNIGHT

The first step towards knighthood was taken when the boy became a "page." From the age of seven to the age of fourteen the youths of a noble family were taught the etiquette of chivalry and the use of light

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arms. They were constantly thrown in the company of ladies that they might early learn gentleness and courtesy.

At the age of fourteen the youth was made a "squire," and entered upon more serious duties. He became the attendant of some knight, whom it was his duty and pleasure to follow into many a thrilling adventure. It was also a part of the squire's service to attend to his master's weapons and armor, and to ride with him to battle or tournament. When in battle, it was his duty to keep near his lord to render whatsoever aid he could. Sometimes it was his good fortune to dash in at a crisis and win distinction for himself.

At the age of twenty-one the young squire reached the goal of his ambition and became a "knight."

The act of conferring knighthood was very important, and was generally attended with impressive ceremonies. The young candidate had first to fast and confess his sins,

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after which he spent a night in prayer. The next morning, after bathing himself as a sign of purification, and donning costly robes, he was escorted to church, where he was examined, that it might be seen if he were worthy to receive the degree. If he was adjudged worthy of ennoblement, he was allowed to partake of the sacrament and to take the vows of knighthood — the vow that he would be “a good, brave, loyal, just, generous, and gentle knight; that he would be a champion of the church and clergy; that he would be a protector of ladies; that he would be a redresser of the wrongs of widows and orphans.”

Then a belt of white and gold was clasped about him, and the golden spurs of knighthood were fastened on his heels. After which, the king or some great noble completed the ceremony by striking the kneeling youth on the shoulder with the flat of his sword, and saying to him,

“Sir Knight, arise!”

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How well the knights kept their vows, or how humanly they failed, has furnished to the world a store of legends that should not pass away, since they represent the beginning of better things.

THE TOURNAMENT

The principal form of amusement in chivalric times was the "tournament" or "tourney," generally held to celebrate some notable occasion. Tournaments usually took place within an oval space, which was railed off for the purpose and was called the "lists." Around this oval were arranged tiers of seats for spectators, many of whom were ladies.

When the time came for the trial at arms, two parties of knights — the challengers and those who accepted the challenge — withdrew to opposite ends of the lists. And a fine spectacle they must have made, for they

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were armed from top to toe, and mounted upon splendid war horses that loved the charge not a whit less than did their riders. Each knight was distinguished by characters or pictures emblazoned on his shield (for all had their faces covered with vizors); each often decorated his helmet with a "favor" from a lady, such as a scarf or a glove. The fair one was highly honored by such a compliment, and she whose knight won in the combat was regarded with much envy.

When everything was ready, the two knights who were chosen to "tilt" first, rode out from their parties and reined their horses exactly opposite each other at the far ends of the lists. Then all became intense excitement; the spectators almost held their breath as the two combatants sat silently regarding each other, with long spears held "in rest," awaiting the signal for the onset.

When the heralds cried, "Let them go!" the two hurled together in the center of the

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lists, each bent on unhorsing his opponent by a well-aimed thrust of his lance. He who was successful in bearing his enemy to earth was greeted with loud applause, and was allowed to choose another antagonist.

The first part of the tournament was given up to these single combats, and the knight who was able to unhorse the greatest number was given a prize and made the hero of the hour.

The grand climax came, however, when all the knights in the tourney formed lines at opposite ends of the field, and rushed together in the center, with a clash of arms that made the earth tremble beneath. In this, as in the single combats, great honors awaited the victorious side.

The people then gave themselves up to merrymaking and feasting; and the glories that they had witnessed were their chief subject of conversation until the next tournament.

Such, in brief, were the incidents of the tourney. There was a more serious side,

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however, and a full account of all its phases would fill a volume.

It is not a wise thing to disregard the steps by which we have ascended — to attempt to judge by twentieth century lights the ages that, in God's providence, have made us what we are.

The practices of Chivalry were designed to cultivate in men that courage and gentleness and high sense of honor essential in all ages to ideal character. If they were not the *best* means of doing this, they were the best known in those days, and we should judge them only by their results.

The institution of Chivalry is dead; but its spirit is immortal, and makes its home in whatever heart is great and generous enough to harbor it. Its latest and best expression is the modern "gentleman" — not the imitation, but the *real* one.

LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR
AND HIS COURT

Legends of King Arthur and His Court

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

“Who should be king save him who makes us free?”

TENNYSON.

WHEN Uther Pendragon was king in Britain, there lived in that country a wonderful magician named Merlin. Now this Merlin, though not a bad man, was at one time persuaded to help the king do an evil deed. In return for this help Merlin exacted a promise from Uther that when a son should be born to the king, he—Merlin—should be allowed to have the child and rear him as he should choose.

The magician could read the future, and of course knew that a little prince would be

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born. He also knew that the king would die shortly, and that great dangers awaited his heir. Maybe it was for this reason that the old magician made Uther promise to give the future prince to him — that he might protect the lad in his tender years and prepare him to be king. Whatever was Merlin's reason for wanting possession of the prince that was to be, one thing is sure—it was a good reason, as was afterwards proved.

Time passed on, and a son was born to the king; but instead of the little prince's birth being heralded abroad amid the rejoicings of a glad people, the infant heir to the proudest throne in Britain was slipped by night out of the castle gates, and given to Merlin to be carried away; and nobody was told that a future king had come into the world.

King Uther trusted Merlin. He believed that the mighty magician would care for his son, and would in time bring Arthur (for so

The Coming of Arthur

the child was named) to the throne which was rightfully his.

And Merlin proved worthy of that trust. He gave the child to a good old knight, Sir Anton, to rear, and himself watched over the boy through all the dark days and through all the glorious days which followed.

Nor was Merlin's the only hand that guided the uncertain steps of Arthur's youth. There came to the child from time to time three beautiful and mysterious queens, who taught him many wonderful things.

But greatest among all the friends of his boyhood was the "Lady of the Lake" — she who is said to have known "a subtler magic than Merlin's own." No mere mortal was she, but a mystic being who dwelt down in the blue depths of the lake, and had "power to walk the waters like our Lord."

When Uther Pendragon died, the unhappy land was for many years ravaged by rival

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knights, each of whom struggled to make himself king. It was during this dark period that Arthur, all unconscious of his kingly origin, grew up to his splendid manhood: grew up to catch the sunlight of a brighter day in his tresses, and the blue truth of Heaven in his eyes. And no man save Merlin knew him to be King Uther's son.

He who told me this story says that once, when Arthur and Merlin were walking along the shore, the young prince complained that he had no weapon; when suddenly from out the bosom of the lake there rose a mighty arm, holding a splendid sword. Arthur rowed across and took the brand. And when he examined the bright, jeweled hilt, he found written on one side, "Take me," but when he turned the other side he read, "Cast me away." And his face was very sad till Merlin said, "Take thou and strike; the time to cast away is yet far off." Arthur

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took the sword and called its name "Excalibur" — cut steel.

Now when the time was ripe for Arthur to be declared king, Merlin advised the quarrelling lords and barons to gather together on a certain day in the largest church in London, to see if God would not show them who should be king.

The people respected and feared the old magician; so at his suggestion a mighty concourse gathered on the day appointed, to wait for a sign from God.

When mass was ended — lo! Merlin stood before them with Arthur at his side. He placed the young prince on a high seat and proclaimed to the people:

"Here is Uther's heir, your king!"

Then were there loud shouts of denial from each who would himself be king, and a hundred voices cried, "Away with him! No king of ours!"

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But Merlin by his magic caused Arthur to be crowned, and as "the savage yells of Uther's peerage died," Arthur's warriors cried, "Be thou the king, and we will work thy will who love thee!" Then the people went down on their knees; and, lifting up their eyes, they beheld a sight so passing fair and wonderful that a hush fell upon the throng.

In the center of the dais sat the fair-haired, god-like King. Through the casement above him three rays of light—flame-color, green, and azure—fell upon three fair queens who had silently taken their places about him. No one knew whence they had come; but they were ever by Arthur's side in time of need.

Merlin, the enchanter, stood beside him; and also near the King, "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," was the Lady of the Lake. Before Arthur, at his crowning,

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was borne his sword, Excalibur, — the brand which she had given him.

Those who were truest and best, the flower of Britain's chivalry, crowded about the King on his coronation day and desired that he knight them with his wonderful sword, Excalibur. As Arthur looked upon them, his own truth and purity seemed mirrored in their faces; for one who saw it says, "I beheld, from eye to eye, through all their order, flash a momentary likeness of the King."

Then in low, deep tones the young King administered to them the oath of knighthood. So sacred and so exalted were the vows which he required of them that, when they arose from their knees, their faces bore witness to the solemnity of the ceremony. Some were deadly pale, some flushed, and others dazed "as one who wakes half-blinded at the coming of a light."

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No wonder the knights paled or flushed
at the sacredness of their vows ; for kneeling
at the feet of Arthur they swore by the cross
of Christ

“To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their king,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity.”

“The coming of a light” indeed ! The
coming of Arthur was the coming of God-
like manliness to an age of barbarity and sin.
Well might old Merlin and you and I and
all the world exclaim,

“O true and tender ! O my liege and King !
O selfless man and stainless gentleman !”

THE MARRIAGE OF ARTHUR AND GUINEVERE

At the time of the coming of Arthur, many petty kings ruled in the isle of Britain. They ever waged war upon each other and wasted all the land; and from time to time heathen hordes swarmed over the seas and ravaged what was left. So there grew up great tracts of wilderness "wherein the beast was ever more and more, but man was less and less."

The land of Cameliard, where Leodogran was king, was the most unhappy land in all the isle; it was constantly a prey to wild beasts and wilder men. The boar and wolf and bear came day and night and wallowed in the gardens of the king, or stole and

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devoured the children. Leodogran's own brother rose up against him; then the heathen came, "reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood."

King Leodogran knew not where to turn for help, till he heard of Arthur, newly crowned. When people told him of this splendid young king, he sent messengers to Arthur, saying, "Arise and help us thou! For here between the man and beast we die."

Arthur had not yet done any deed of arms, but true to his knightly spirit he arose and went into the land of Cameliard at the call of a fellow-creature in distress; and with him rode a goodly company of knights.

Now it chanced that Guinevere, the beautiful daughter of the king of Cameliard, stood by the walls of her father's castle to see the arrival of King Arthur and his company. But Arthur rode "a simple knight among his knights," and wore no sign or symbol by



GUINEVERE SEES ARTHUR BY THE CASTLE WALL

Marriage of Arthur and Guinevere

which any one could recognize his rank ; so Guinevere did not know him to be the young king. But he, in passing, looked down upon the lovely maid and ever after carried her fair image in his heart.

But Arthur did not tarry at the castle to see the beautiful princess ; he rode on and pitched his tents beside the forest. He fought a mighty battle with the heathen and drove them out of the land of Cameliard. Then he caused the forests to be cut down, letting in the sunlight, and made broad pathways for the hunter and the knight. And having done this, he returned to his own kingdom.

Meantime, while Arthur was absent, the great lords and barons of his kingdom, joining with a score of petty kings, rose up against him with the cry, " Who hath proven him King Uther's son ? " And he returned from his victory over the heathen to find his own people in arms against him.

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When the King and his knights reached the field where the traitor forces were gathered, the day was so clear that the "smallest rock on the faintest hill" could be distinctly seen; so when they advanced and flung their banners to the breeze, they were marked at once by the waiting enemy. Then, to clarion call and trumpet blast, with the shoutings of a thousand rebel throats, the traitors came thundering to meet the King's army. And right valiantly did the true and loyal receive the shock! Then horse to horse and man to man the battle raged — now lost! — now won! Suddenly a blinding storm came down upon them, and the fires of heaven, lighting up the red earth, showed Arthur in the foremost of the battle, fighting like a young god.

And lo! the foe turned and fled. Arthur's knights would have followed, dealing death

Marriage of Arthur and Guinevere

among the flying numbers, but the ever merciful King cried, "Stop! They yield!"

"So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced; the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord."

And Arthur laughed upon the dark-eyed Launcelot, the knight whom he loved and honored most, and said:

"*Thou* dost not doubt me king, so well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."

"Sir and my liege," cried Launcelot, "the fire of God descends upon thee in the battle-field; I know thee for my king." Whereat the two "sware on the field of death a deathless love," and Arthur said, "Man's word is God in man; let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

When the king had put down the rebellion, his whole heart and mind turned to the beautiful Guinevere; and he straightway

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sent three of his trusted knights to Leodogran, saying,

“If I in aught have served thee well, give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.”

Now the old king was sore troubled at the message. He was deeply grateful to Arthur for having saved him from his enemies, and he realized what an advantage to himself it would be to be allied to so great a warrior; but he had heard many conflicting stories about Arthur's birth, and he did not wish to wed his daughter to a man who might not be the son of a king.

So he summoned his gray-haired chamberlain, and after him the knights from King Arthur's court, and asked many questions concerning the birth of Arthur.

Not satisfied with the testimony of these, — for all believed in the royal descent of Arthur, though none could prove it, — Leodogran next questioned Bellicent, Queen of

Marriage of Arthur and Guinevere

Orkney and sister to Arthur. Her story was scarcely more convincing. But it came to pass that night that King Leodogran dreamed a dream in which he beheld Arthur standing in the heavens, crowned. And he awoke and sent back the knights, answering, "Yea."

King Arthur was glad at the tidings, and dispatched the knight whom he loved and honored most to bring the Queen. And Launcelot departed in the latter part of April, and returned among the May flowers with Guinevere.

With the fair young bride King Leodogran sent to Arthur a goodly company of his most valiant knights, and also a wonderful round table, which was said to be large enough for the accommodation of an hundred and fifty persons.

Now this round table had been given Leodogran by King Uther Pendragon, and

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was said to possess magic powers. King Arthur was much pleased with these gifts. He received the stranger knights into his own order, and placed the round table in the banquet hall of the castle. And there ever after the knightly were wont to meet, to feast and exchange noble converse. From that time King Arthur's knights were known as the Knights of the Round Table.

No fairer marriage morn has ever dawned upon the world than that on which the King and Guinevere knelt before the holy St. Dudric to exchange vows of deathless love.

The great city seemed "on fire with sun and cloth of gold." Beyond, the fair fields of Britain were white with the flowers of May, and white were the flowers that decked the marriage altar, and white the raiment of King Arthur's knights who stood round him, "glorying in their vows and him."

Marriage of Arthur and Guinevere

And there before the altar Arthur said :

“ Let chance what will, I love thee to the death ! ” And the Queen replied :

“ King and my lord, I love thee to the death ! ”

Then the holy Dudric spread his hands above them saying, “ Reign ye, and live and love and make the world other, and may thy Queen be one with thee, and all this order of thy Table Round fulfill the boundless purpose of their King.”

The bridal train left the church amid a joyful blast of trumpets ; and Arthur's warriors sang before the King,

“ Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May ;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away !
Blow thro' the living world — ‘ Let the King reign.’

Shall Rome or heathen rule in Arthur's realm ?
Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

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Strike for the King and live! His knights have
heard

That God hath told the King a secret word.

Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

Blow trumpet! He will lift us from the dust.

Blow trumpet! Live the strength and die the lust!

Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King
reign.

Strike for the King and die! And if thou diest,

The King is king, and ever wills the highest.

Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King
reign.

Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!

Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!

Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King
reign.

The King will follow Christ, and we the King,

In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.

Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign."

GARETH AND LYNETTE

PART I

KING ARTHUR became mightier day by day. He drew the many petty kingdoms under him; he overthrew the heathen in twelve great battles and drove them out of the land; he crushed out the Roman power in Britain, and "made a realm and reigned." Verily the King *was* king and ever willed the highest!

Bellicent, wife of King Lot of Orkney and sister to Arthur, was the mother of many stalwart sons, some of whom were knights at Arthur's court. The youngest, fairest, and tallest of them all, Gareth, was kept at home by the over-foolish fondness of his mother.

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Strong of limb and stout of heart, the young lad was ever restive under his mother's coddling, and longed for the excitement of the lists and the sterner joys of the battle-field. And he ever plagued her to allow him to be gone, saying:

"Man am I grown, a man's work must I do."

But the queen mother steadfastly refused him leave to go, and tried to distract his thoughts, saying:

"Stay; follow the deer. So make thy manhood mightier, sweet, in the chase."

But Gareth answered her: "Follow the deer? Follow the Christ, the King! Else wherefore born?"

At length, worn out with his pleadings, the queen thought to quiet him by granting his request, but on conditions such as he would certainly reject. Looking keenly at him all the while, she told him that he must

Gareth and Lynette

go in disguise to Camelot, and hire himself as a kitchen knave in the King's palace, to serve a twelvemonth and a day; and that until he had fulfilled this term of service, he should not make himself known.

Great was the chagrin of Bellicent when Gareth assented to her terms; but when he lingered the half-hope rose in the queen's heart that he would yet resolve to stay.

She did not know her son.

Early one morning, while the castle was yet asleep, Gareth arose and clad himself like a tiller of the soil; and taking with him two serving-men, disguised like himself, he quietly slipped away to King Arthur's court.

When they were come to Camelot, the "city of shadowy palaces," their joy and wonder were great indeed; for Camelot was the work of ancient kings who wrought the history of their days in stone, and of the

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enchanter Merlin, who by his magic raised castle, palace, wall, and tower.

The clang of arms was heard ever and anon, as the knights passed in and out of their halls; the eyes of pure women glanced shyly out of the casements; "and all about a healthful people stept, as in the presence of a gracious king."

With his young heart hammering in his ears, Gareth ascended to the hall where the King held court. There he beheld with his own eyes the great Arthur Pendragon, seated, crowned; and the far-famed knights of the Round Table, who watched with loving eyes their lord, eager to do his bidding. Gareth's manly heart beat high when he heard King Arthur's clear, deep tones:

"We sit king, to help the wronged throughout all our realm."

Ever and anon there came to Arthur men and women from various parts of the country,

Gareth and Lynette

to complain of wrong suffered or misfortune endured. And the King hearkened with an ear of sympathy to their complaints.

As each tale of suffering was recited, some knight would cry: "A boon, Sir King! Give me to right this wrong."

The King would grant the boon, and the knight would ride away to redress the wrong, counting himself most happy in being allowed to do battle for Christ and for the King.

There came a messenger from King Mark of Cornwall, bearing a magnificent present of cloth of gold which he laid at the feet of Arthur. He told the King that Mark desired to be made knight of the Round Table.

Then the King, who had been but a moment before all gentle courtesy to a peevish woman, rose in a mighty wrath and cast the gift into the fire. He told the messenger to return and to warn Mark of Cornwall to keep forever out of his sight;

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for Mark was a traitorous, lying king — a craven, coward thing that would strike when a man was off his guard. Then quickly softening, Arthur said to the frightened messenger:

“It is no fault of thine”; and he bade Sir Kay, the seneschal, look to the man’s wants and treat him courteously.

Then came Gareth, leaning on his two companions, and cried:

“A boon, Sir King! For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn I seem, leaning on these? Grant me to serve for meat and drink among thy kitchen knaves a twelve-month and a day, nor seek my name. Hereafter I will fight.”

The King answered him, saying: “A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon! But if thou wilt no goodlier, have then thy will. Sir Kay shall be thy master.” Then the King rose and departed.

Gareth and Lynette

Launcelot, whose keen, dark eyes had watched the scene, now spoke to Sir Kay, and called his attention to the noble appearance of Gareth. He advised the seneschal to use the boy kindly, saying that he was no doubt come of noble blood. But the rough Kay told Launcelot to attend to his own affairs, and thereafter made life very unpleasant for Gareth.

In spite of his hard master, the petted youth found his service not unbearable. He was doing his duty; that was comfort enough. He listened with pleasure to the chat of his fellow-knaves concerning the great lords above them. Best of all, he liked the stories about Launcelot and the King — about their love for each other, and how “Launcelot was the first in tournament, but Arthur mightiest on the battlefield.” And it was in this lowly company that Gareth first heard the prophecy which said that the King should not suffer

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death, but should pass away from mortal sight, none knowing whither. ʘ

Once in a while Sir Kay would give Gareth leave, and he would hasten away to the jousts to watch the great deeds of arms, learning as he looked. And Launcelot was ever kind to him.

After many weeks, Queen Bellicent relented and sent arms to her son, releasing him from the promise which she had required of him.

Gareth then hastened to the King and told him all. His royal liege and kinsman received him gladly and made him knight of the Table Round. Then Gareth begged that his name and state might still remain unknown, save to Launcelot; and also that he might be granted the next quest.

The King consented; but he summoned Launcelot privily and, having told him Gareth's secret and request, charged him to

Gareth and Lynette

take horse and follow when the young knight should set forth on his first quest.

“Cover the lions on thy shield,” he said to Launcelot, “and see he be nor ta’en nor slain.”

Now that same day there came to the court a beautiful damsel, demanding help. Not in suppliance came she, but in a passion of indignation. And she proceeded to tell the King in no very humble terms about the condition of certain parts of his realm, and what *she* would do if *she* were king.

Arthur, ever courteous to a woman, disregarded her impatience and gently asked her name and need.

Somewhat pacified by the manner of the King, the damsel told him that her name was Lynette, and that she had come to fetch a knight to deliver her sister, the Lady Lyonors, who was imprisoned in Castle Perilous. She said that there was a river which flowed in

King Arthur and His Court

three loops about the castle, and that this river was crossed by three bridges, each of which was held by a mighty knight; that there was a fourth and more terrible knight, in league with the others, who besieged the castle and declared that he would take it and force the Lady Lyonors to wed him. Lynette further told the King that it was the boast of this last-named knight that he would defeat the mightiest in the land and wed the Lady Lyonors with glory. It was because Lynette had promised to fetch Launcelot to combat this knight that he had allowed her to pass from Castle Perilous; and now she demanded of the King that Launcelot return with her and slay these four and set her sister free.

“A boon, Sir King—this quest!” cried a strong young voice; and lo! Gareth, in kitchen garb, stood up among that knightly company.



LYNETTE AND ARTHUR

Gareth and Lynette

The King had promised. He knit his brows for a moment, then, looking up, said: "Go."

All save Launcelot stood amazed. The face of Lynette burned with indignation as she lifted her arms and cried:

"Fie on thee, King! I asked thy chiefest knight, and thou hast given me but a kitchen knave!" Then, ere any man could stay her, she fled down the long hall, sprang upon her horse, and dashed away.

Flinging off the loose garment of the kitchen knave and displaying to the astonished knights a full suit of armor, Sir Gareth strode after her. At the door he found a splendid horse, a shield, and arms, which the King had provided for him. Losing no time, he sprang upon his charger and rode after the ungrateful damsel whom he had undertaken to aid. Then straightway Sir Launcelot covered the lions on his shield and followed at a distance.

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After her first wrathful dash through field and forest, Lynette checked her horse somewhat to reflect, when, to her great indignation, she saw the "kitchen knave" in full armor, close behind.

"Damsel, the quest is mine. Lead and I follow," he said in gentlest courtesy.

But Lynette scorned his services, calling him "knave" and "scullion." And she railed against King Arthur for sending a serving-man to bear her company and fight her battles. Then she whipped up her steed again, thinking to escape Gareth's unwelcome championship; but the young knight followed close behind her.

Now it chanced that Lynette, in her blind wrath, gave little heed to the direction of her journey; and Gareth, not knowing the way, unquestioning, followed his reckless guide. Soon they realized that they were lost. They had entered a deep and tangled

Gareth and Lynette

wood, and the shadows of evening were sifting down about them. On and on they went, trying to find a way out, when presently they came upon six tall men bearing a seventh, bound, to a lake hard by. Seeing that the villains were about to drown a helpless man, Gareth dashed among them with drawn sword and dealt mighty blows right and left. Three he felled to the earth, and the three others, seeing the fate of their companions, left their victim and fled through the forest. Then Gareth unbound the maltreated man, who proved to be lord of a great castle near by. The baron was deeply grateful to Gareth for having delivered him, and asked what reward the young knight would like to receive.

"None," said Gareth bluntly. "For the deed's sake I have done the deed, in uttermost obedience to the King." Gareth then said he would be much pleased if the lord

King Arthur and His Court

would grant them entertainment in his castle till the morrow. The good baron took them home with him and treated them right royally.

The willful Lynette had determined to see no good in her knight, so she only tilted her nose a trifle higher and pretended to believe that he had succeeded in his valorous deed by accident.

GARETH AND LYNETTE

PART II

THE next morning the baron told them what path to take, and they mounted and rode away. Lynette, still taunting the young knight, advised him to turn back; for they were hard upon the first of those dreadful knights whom he had come to combat.

“Lead and I follow,” was Gareth’s only reply.

Soon they came to the first of the three great loops of the river which wound around Castle Perilous; and Gareth beheld the bridge that was sentineled by the knight “Phosphorus.”

Just across the stream they saw his silk pavilion all gay in gold and white, with a

King Arthur and His Court

crimson banner floating over it. Before the pavilion paced a knight unarmed. But when he saw Lynette and her champion he called:

“Daughters of the Dawn, approach and arm me!”

Out of the pavilion came three rosy maidens with the dew glistening on their hair. These armed the knight in blue armor and gave to him a blue shield.

When the knight of the azure shield was mounted and ready, he and Gareth placed their spears in rest and dashed together. Both spears bent in the shock, both knights lay unhorsed on the bridge; but Gareth, springing lightly to his feet, drew his sword and, showering fierce blows upon his enemy, drove him backward. Then Lynette — half in scorn, half in astonished admiration — cried after him: “Well stricken, kitchen knave!”

Gareth and Lynette

In another moment Gareth had his foe on the ground, defeated.

“Take not my life; I yield!” cried Phosphorus.

But Gareth refused to spare him unless Lynette would ask it. At first the damsel scorned to beg a favor of the “kitchen knave”; but, seeing that Gareth was in earnest, she at length condescended to crave mercy for the defeated knight.

Then Gareth pardoned Phosphorus, first having made him promise to go to the court of Arthur and offer himself as a true and loyal knight — nevermore to bear arms against the King.

As if repentant of having cheered him on in his combat, Lynette now treated Gareth with the greater scorn and taunted him the more cruelly as they rode towards the second loop of the river. There they found the knight “Meridies,” “huge, on a huge red

King Arthur and His Court

horse," bearing a shield with the great sun blazoned on it.

He and Gareth met in mid-stream. A fierce combat ensued, during which the horse of Meridies slipped on the rocks and fell with his rider. Then Meridies yielded him to Gareth, being too much bruised by his fall to continue the fight.

Gareth compelled from him the same promise which he had required of Phosphorus; and he and the damsel rode forward.

If Gareth believed that his victory over the second knight would win him the favor of the Lady Lynette, he soon realized his mistake. She only laughed at him, saying that he could not have won the victory had not the horse of his foe slipped and fallen.

Then came the combat at the third bridge with the third knight, "Hesperus." Old and strong was he, and clothed in many tough skins. No rosy maidens came trip-

Gareth and Lynette

ping out to arm him for the fray, but a grizzled damsel, bearing old armor crowned with a withered crest.

Here also was Gareth victorious — this time by the help of no accident, but by the very strength of his good right arm. The struggle was long and fierce, and many times he was in dire danger; but he returned to the fight again and again, like a man who knew not how to fail.

Lynette, acknowledging his valor at last, cried out to cheer him, again and again:

“Well done, knave knight!” and “Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round!”

At length, inspired by her voice, Gareth ended the combat by closing his strong arms around his foe (for both had been unhorsed) and pitching him over the bridge into the stream below.

“Lead and I follow,” he said to the damsel; but Lynette replied:

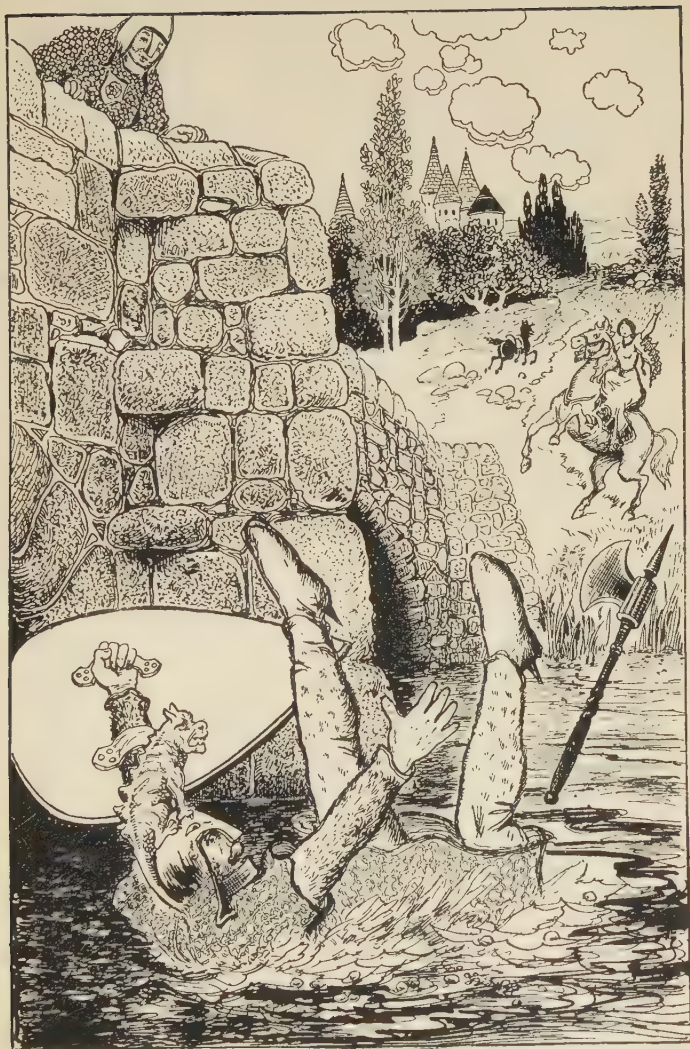
King Arthur and His Court

“I lead no longer; ride thou at my side.” She then very graciously apologized for her former rudeness to him. Of course a knight who had had the example of the gentle King before him knew how to forgive a maiden’s waywardness; and the two rode on together, friends.

Then came the night upon them; and the damsel told him of a cavern, hard at hand, where the Lady Lyonors had caused to be placed bread and meat and wine for the refreshment of the good knight who should come to deliver her. As they were about to enter the cave, Launcelot rode up and made himself known to them, and the three went in together.

Then Gareth told the maiden who he was — a prince in disguise — and she was much pleased to find that her champion was so great a personage.

Worn out with travel and with fighting,



GARETH PITCHES HESPERUS OVER THE BRIDGE

Gareth and Lynette

Gareth finally dropped into a deep sleep ; and while he slumbered, Lynette and Launcelot planned his next adventure for him.

There was one of the four knights yet to be overthrown, "Nox," the most terrible, who besieged the Lady Lyonors in Castle Perilous. He it was who had allowed Lynette to ride out of her sister's castle, that she might bear his challenge to Sir Launcelot.

Now Lynette knew that Nox would not do battle with any less famous knight than Launcelot ; and since Gareth had fought so valiantly all her other battles, she wished him to win his full measure of glory by defeating the fourth and most terrible knight of all. Neither did the generous Launcelot wish in any wise to lessen Gareth's glory by taking upon himself the chief battle. So while the youth slept, Launcelot and the maid decided that Gareth should bear the shield of Launcelot — that Nox might

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mistake him for the knight whom he had challenged, and so not decline to do battle with him.

So it came about that when they mounted and rode again, Gareth went before, bearing the lions of Launcelot. Suddenly Lynette rode forward to his side and grasped his shield. There was now no trace of the scornful damsel of the day before. Self-blame and fear paled her lovely face, and her eyes were full of pleading as she begged her knight to give back the shield to Launcelot.

"Wonders ye have done; miracles ye cannot. I swear thou canst not fling the fourth," she cried. And in her fear for him, she told horrible stories of Nox to deter him from his purpose.

"O prince!" she cried, "I went for Launcelot first. The quest is Launcelot's; give him back the shield."

Gareth and Lynette

But Gareth would not yield, so Lynette fell back, sighing, "Heaven help thee!"

After a few more paces she pointed in front of them and whispered, "There!"

Through the shadows of night the gloomy walls of Castle Perilous rose before them. On the plain in front was pitched the huge pavilion of Nox — jet black, with a jet black banner floating above.

Gareth seized the long black horn that hung beside the pavilion and blew three mighty blasts thereon in challenge. Suddenly lights twinkled in the castle, and the Lady Lyonors appeared at a window with her maidens to see the champion who had come to deliver her.

They heard hollow tramlings and muffled voices, and presently the curtain of the great black pavilion was drawn aside and the monster, Nox, rode out. High on a night-black horse, with night-black arms, he rode.

King Arthur and His Court

On his breastplate were painted the ribs of a skeleton, and instead of a crest a grinning skull crowned his helmet.

The monster paused, but spoke no word. All stood aghast with horror. A maiden at the castle window swooned. The Lady Lyonors wept and wrung her hands; and even Launcelot felt the ice strike through his blood for a moment.

Those who did not shut their eyes for terror saw Gareth and the black knight suddenly dash together; and they could hardly trust their own sight when they beheld the great Nox unhorsed. They looked again and saw Gareth split the fearful skull with one stroke of his sword, and with another lay wide open the helmet beneath it. Then — wonderful to relate! — there appeared out of the cloven helmet the bright face of a blooming boy. He yielded him to Gareth, crying, “ Knight, slay me not ! ”

Gareth and Lynette

When Gareth consented to spare his life, the boy told that the three knights at the bridges were his brothers, and had compelled him to array himself in that fearful guise to frighten the inmates of the castle — never dreaming that any hostile knight could safely pass the bridges.

Then was there great rejoicing and merry-making at the castle ; the Lady Lyonors was free. And news was carried back to King Arthur how well his young knight had struck for the right and him.

“He that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later, says Lynette.”

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LAUNCELOT AND ELAINE

PART I

ONCE upon a time a king and his brother fought to the death in a lonely glen; and such was the horror which thereafter clung about the place, that no man went to cover their ghastly bodies with their mother dust, and no man walked that way again for fear.

Now it chanced that Arthur in his wanderings — ere they had crowned him king — strayed into this horror-haunted dell, not knowing where he was. Nor did he realize it till he stepped upon a skeleton, and saw roll from the head thereof a glittering diadem. He ran after the crown, and picked

Launcelot and Elaine

it up and placed it on his head — his heart all the while whispering, “Lo, thou likewise shalt be king.”

In the after years, when he became king indeed, he caused the nine large diamonds that ornamented the crown of the dead king to be taken out. And he proclaimed, each year thereafter for nine years, a great joust, in which the knight who should bear him most valiantly should be rewarded with one of these priceless gems.

Eight years passed and eight jousts were held, and in each Launcelot won the diamond. Now when the time was come for the last diamond joust, great preparations were made throughout the realm, for this was to be the most splendid of them all.

Launcelot was so easily first in all knightly deeds, it came to be said about the court that men went down before him in the lists through the very power of his reputation,

King Arthur and His Court

and not through any superior strength or skill that he possessed.

Hearing this gossip, Launcelot conceived a plan by which to prove to the knights their mistake. He pretended to the King that an old hurt pained him, so that he must needs remain at home from this trial at arms.

It grieved the King sorely that his best beloved knight should miss the last and greatest joust of all; for he had felt sure that Launcelot would win in this as in all the others. So he rode away with his knights, sorrowing to leave Launcelot behind.

No sooner had the King left, than Launcelot mounted his horse and, taking a seldom-trodden path through the forest, went by a longer route towards the field of tournament. But he had never ridden that way before, and he soon lost himself in the lonely wood. After many wanderings, he saw on a far

Launcelot and Elaine

distant hill a stately castle. To this point he directed his good steed, and soon arrived before the massive gate of Astolat. He wound the horn which hung beside it; and forth there came to admit him an old, myriad-wrinkled man, who made signs to the knight that he was dumb.

The lord of Astolat and his two sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine, met him in the court with kindly welcome. And the daughter of the house, she who for her beauty and her purity was called "the lily maid of Astolat," came also to greet him.

The host asked the stranger's name and state, adding that he supposed him, by his bearing, to be one of King Arthur's knights.

Launcelot told him that he was one of the Table Round, but craved that his name might be his secret, since he wished to attend the coming joust in disguise; and he begged also that a shield be lent him, that none

King Arthur and His Court

might recognize him in the lists. For Launcelot had decided to tilt as an unknown knight, that no man might be overawed by his great reputation.

The lord of Astolat courteously allowed his secret, and told him that he might bear the shield of Sir Torre, which was "blank enough" — Torre having been injured in his first tilt, so that he was never again able to bear arms. The old man added that Lavaine wished to go also and take part in the diamond joust.

As they stood thus in pleasant converse, Elaine, the lily maid, watched the handsome face of Launcelot worshipfully, marking here and there a scar from an old wound. And from that moment she loved him "with that love which was her doom."

That night Launcelot abode at the castle of Astolat, Sir Lavaine having promised to ride with him on the morrow to the place

Launcelot and Elaine

of tournament. The attendants spread meat and drink before them, and pleasant moments were spent in feasting and talking together. Much the people of Astolat asked about King Arthur and his Round Table knights. Launcelot told them at length the story of Arthur's glorious wars; and none knew better how to tell it, for he was ever nearest the King in those hard-fought battles. Yet he spoke not of his own valor, but always of the King's, ending with:

"I never saw his like; there lives no greater."

"Save your great self, fair lord," whispered Elaine in her foolish heart; and she loved him all the more.

All night the lily maid lay and dreamed of Launcelot; and when early dawn was come, she arose and robed herself and stole down the long tower stairs to say good-by to—her brother, so she told her throbbing heart.

King Arthur and His Court

Lavaine was making ready for the journey, and Launcelot waited in the court, patting his charger's neck. His quick ear catching a light step, the knight looked up and beheld in the dewy light of dawn a maid so fair and flower-like that he stood silent, more amazed than if seven men had set upon him. "He had not dreamed she was so beautiful" — he looked and wondered, but he did not love.

Suddenly a wild desire flashed in the heart of Elaine. She had heard how the knights wore in the lists "tokens" or "favors" from ladies whom they loved or wished to honor; and she much desired that this great knight should wear her favor in the coming joust. Her young heart beat high with fear, yet she could but ask the courtesy of him, and she said:

"Fair lord whose name I know not — will you wear my favor in this tourney?"

Launcelot and Elaine

Now Launcelot had never worn the favor of any lady in the land, and he had a secret reason for wishing not to do so now; so, disliking to refuse a maiden bluntly, he merely told her of his custom.

But Elaine would not take the half-expressed refusal. She told him that since such had been his wont, the wearing of a lady's favor at *this* joust, where he wished to be unknown, would but help to complete his disguise.

"True, my child. Well, I will wear it; fetch it out to me," answered Launcelot.

The maiden then brought out to him a red sleeve embroidered with pearls. And he bound it to his helmet, saying with a smile:

"I never yet have done so much for any maiden living."

When Lavaine brought out Sir Torre's shield to Launcelot, the knight gave his own to Elaine, saying:

King Arthur and His Court

“Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield in keeping till I come.” Then Lavaine kissed the roses back to the cheeks of the lily maid, and Launcelot kissed his hand to her, and the two knights rode away.

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“Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot.”

Thus says the poet. And he tells us further how she placed the shield where the sun's first rays would strike it and waken her from dreams of the great knight for whom she had it in keeping; how, later, fearing rust, she embroidered a case to enclose it, fashioning with slender silken threads designs like those on the shield itself, each in its own color; how, day by day, she stripped the cover off and studied the naked shield, making for herself a pretty



ELAINE AND LAUNCELOT'S SHIELD

Launcelot and Elaine

history of how each dint and cut had been made—in what tournament or on what battlefield. Thus passed her days in vain and sweet imaginings.

The two knights rode on to the lists, and as they journeyed the elder said:

“Hear, but hold my name hidden; you ride with Launcelot of the Lake.” Lavaine was surprised and abashed at the great name, and stammered as he replied:

“Is it so indeed?” Then, as if to himself, he murmured, “The great Launcelot.”

When they reached the lists by Camelot, in the meadow, the young, unproven knight was overjoyed at the gorgeous sight which met his eyes. The great semicircular gallery of seats, filled with richly dressed spectators, “lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass.” The knights, magnificent in their armored array, were already assembling in the lists. The Round Table knights were

King Arthur and His Court

the challenging party, and those who came to tilt against them were kings, princes, and barons, and knights from far and near.

Lavaine let his eyes wander till they found the clear-faced King. In high estate King Arthur sat, robed in red samite. The golden dragons of his father, Uther Pendragon, or Uther Dragonhead, stood out in all the carvings about the royal seat. A golden dragon, clinging to his crown, writhed down his long robe. Two others formed the arms of the chair of state. Just above the King's head, in the ornaments of the canopy, was a golden flower, the center of which was the ninth and largest diamond, the prize of the day.

Launcelot's eyes also sought the King, and he said to Lavaine: "Me you call great—I am not great; there is the man."

There was little time for converse then. Lavaine beheld the company of knights divide—they that assailed and they that

Launcelot and Elaine

held the lists taking positions at opposite ends of the great oval field. With helmets crested with their ladies' favors or with nodding plumes, and long lances bedecked with pennons that danced to the lilt of the breeze, the great company of knights awaited the signal for the onset. And no less impatient than their riders, the splendid war-horses quivered for the spring.

As the knights formed lines for the coming shock, Launcelot, signaling to Lavaine, drew out of the range of combat. The younger knight would fain have entered the sport at once, but the wish of Launcelot was law to his hero-worshipping heart, and he followed his leader.

Suddenly the heralds blew a mighty blast on their trumpets; the knights struck spur; and riders and steeds, alike wild with the joy of conflict, hurled them together in the center of the lists. Then for a few mad, glorious

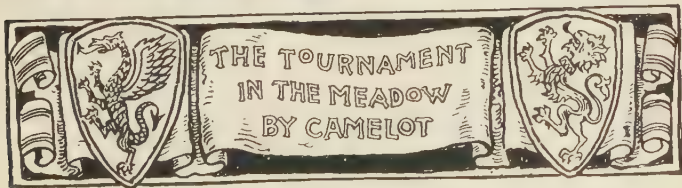
King Arthur and His Court

moments the hard earth trembled with the shock, and the clear air of morning reverberated with the thunder of arms.

Launcelot tarried a little till he saw which was the stronger party; then hurled his force against it, Lavaine following his lead.

The knights of the Round Table were by far the mightier in the field till he of the scarlet sleeve dashed against them. Then was Launcelot Launcelot indeed. No need to speak of his glory. "King, duke, earl, count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew."

The spectators half rose in their seats in astonished admiration at his deeds; the eyes of the great King brightened; the knights in the lists were wonderstruck that other than Launcelot should almost outdo the deeds of Launcelot. There arose in the hearts of the Round Table knights a keen jealousy that a stranger should surpass in chivalric deeds the mightiest of their order. The cousins



(From an old tapestry)

of Launcelot—fine knights and strong—determining to overthrow the stranger, and thus leave their kinsman peerless still, suddenly bore down upon the disguised knight—a mighty company against one man. One lance, held downward, lamed the charger of the unknown knight; another sharply pricked his cuirass, and passing through it, pierced deeply Launcelot's side. And the head thereof broke off and remained.

Then did Lavaine right gallantly. Fired by the danger of his beloved lord, he bore a seasoned and mighty knight to earth, then brought the horse to Launcelot where he lay.

Sweating with agony, the great knight mounted the steed. At the rise of their leader, whom they had thought defeated, the courage of Launcelot's party blazed out afresh, and, with the knight of the scarlet sleeve fighting furiously in front, they pressed the Round Table knights back—back—

King Arthur and His Court

back to the very extremity of the lists. Another wild blast of trumpets proclaimed the unknown knight victor of the day; and his party cried, "Advance and take your prize!"

But Launcelot answered, "For God's love a little air!— My prize is death. Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not." So saying, he and Lavaine vanished from the field. The two made their way quickly into a deep poplar grove, and rode for many weary miles till they came to the cave of a hermit. The old friar took them in, and staunched the blood which flowed from Launcelot's wound when the lance-head was drawn out. Though this good hermit had much knowledge of healing, and though he and Lavaine nursed faithfully the wounded knight, for many days Launcelot lay between life and death, nor could they tell which way the scale would turn.

LAUNCELOT AND ELAINE

PART II

Now on that day when Launcelot and Lavaine disappeared from the lists, there was great wonder and pity among the knights and ladies there. The party which Launcelot had so gloriously led went straightway to the King, saying :

“Sire, our knight through whom we won the day hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize untaken, crying that his prize is death.”

The King was troubled. His great heart was filled with pity that so good a knight was perhaps wounded to the death ; then, too, he had suspected through it all that

King Arthur and His Court

the unknown hero was no other than his best beloved Launcelot. So, taking the diamond from the heart of the flower where it blazed, King Arthur gave it to Sir Gawain, and charged him to ride night and day till he should find the knight who had so dearly won it, and give it him. And he charged Sir Gawain also to return speedily and bring news to court of how the stranger fared.

Sir Gawain went unwillingly. The feasting and merry-making at the joust were yet to come, and he loved the banquet and the company of great ladies better than he loved the service of the King. But the King was king; and the knight took the diamond and rode away in quest of Launcelot.

He passed through all the region round, and stopped at all places save the hermit's cell. At length, wearied with fruitless searching, he tarried to rest at the castle of Astolat.

Launcelot and Elaine

Here he told the story of the joust to the fair Elaine, who well-nigh swooned at the news of Launcelot's hurt. Then she brought him Launcelot's shield; and when he saw the lions thereon, he knew full well that the unknown knight was indeed Launcelot — and so he told the lily maid.

Gawain was tired of the quest, and, believing that Elaine knew where Sir Launcelot was hidden, he persuaded her to take the diamond in keeping for its owner, and rode back to court.

Arrived at Camelot, the unfaithful knight well knew that he must make some excuse to King Arthur for having left the diamond in any hand save that to which the King had sent it. So, relying on his sovereign's great deference to women, Gawain ended the story of his fruitless journey by pretending that he thought the rules of courtesy bound him to leave the diamond with the maiden.

King Arthur and His Court

The "seldom-frowning" King frowned and answered :

"Too courteous, truly! Ye shall go no more on quest of mine, seeing that ye forget obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

Far away the maid of Astolat ever kept the image of Launcelot in her guileless heart. Day by day she watched for him, but he did not come. At length, heart-sick with waiting, she crept to her father's side and besought him to allow her to go in search of Lavaine. The old man guessed her secret, and fain would have detained her at home; but she had ever been a petted, willful child, and he could not say her nay. So, in the company of her good brother, Sir Torre, she set out to find her knight and bear the diamond to him. At length, riding through a field of flowers near the poplar grove, they came upon Lavaine, practicing on his steed.

Launcelot and Elaine

Right joyful were they at the meeting, and Lavaine guided them to the wounded knight in the hermit's woodland cell. Low on a couch of wolfskins lay the great Launcelot, gaunt and pain-wasted, scarcely more than the bare skeleton of his mighty self.

With a dolorous little cry, the maid slipped down beside him, and, when he turned his fever-kindled eyes upon her, she held up the gem, saying falteringly :

“Your prize, the diamond sent you by the King.” Then, in a breaking voice, she told him of all the events which had followed upon his disappearance from the lists.

She was kneeling by his side ; and, as one might caress a child, he kissed her sweet face, and turned and slept.

Through many a weary day and many a wearier night, the maid of Astolat watched over the mightiest of King Arthur's knights ;

King Arthur and His Court

and at length the hermit told her that through her untiring care the knight had been saved from death. They tarried yet a little while till Launcelot's hurt was healed, and then the three rode back to Astolat.

Now after they were come to her father's castle, Elaine for many days arrayed herself in her loveliest robes—for Launcelot was long their guest—and sought to learn if the knight returned her love.

At last the time came when the knight felt that he must leave them and go back to the service of the King. He was so deeply grateful for Elaine's tender care of him during his woful sickness, that he besought her to allow him to do her some service or to grant her some boon in token of his gratitude. He was lord of his own land, he told her—rich and powerful; and that what he willed he could perform.

Launcelot and Elaine

“Speak your wish,” he pleaded—little knowing what that wish would be. Then suddenly and passionately she spake:

“I have gone mad. I love you; let me die!”

“Ah, sister,” cried Launcelot, “what is this?”

“Your love—to be your wife,” she answered simply, and she held her white arms out to him.

But Launcelot answered, “Had I chosen to wed, I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine; but now there never will be wife of mine.”

And she said, “Not to be with you, not to see your face,—alas for me then, my good days are done!”

Alas! The day of parting had come, and she who had loved him back from death to life had not won a dearer name from him than “sister.”

Then Launcelot sought to lessen her heartache, saying that this was not love, but

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only the first wild fancy of her youth. He told her that it would soon give way to a deeper, nobler affection for some one better suited to her years. And he promised that when she should thus find the real love of her life, he, Launcelot, would endow her lover with half his realm beyond the seas. And more than that — that he would be her knight in all her quarrels, even to the death.

But the maid replied, “Of all this will I nothing,” and fell swooning to the earth.

Now it chanced that the lord of Astolat, wandering in a grove, heard what passed between Elaine and the knight. He was sorely grieved because of his daughter’s sorrow, but he could not find it in his heart to blame Sir Launcelot. The knight had treated her with all tender courtesy, and since he could not love her, it was but honorable that he should not wed her. So after the maid had been borne to her chamber, the

Launcelot and Elaine

father went to Launcelot and begged the knight that he use some rough discourtesy to her, that she might cease to love him. The lord of Astolat knew full well that knightly courtesy is quick to win the hearts of maidens; and he felt that if Launcelot could for once lay aside his grace of bearing toward her, Elaine would conceive a dislike to him, and sigh no more for his love.

It was not in the nature of Launcelot to do an unknighly act, but seeing the wisdom and the real kindness in such a course, he promised to try.

On the evening of the same day he called for his horse and armor, and prepared to leave for the court of King Arthur. Elaine uncased his shield and sent it down to him. Then she flung her casement wide and looked down to see Launcelot ride away. She knew he had heard her unclasp and open the casement, but the knight did not

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look up. Without so much as a glance or a wave of the hand in farewell, he mounted and rode sadly away. "This was the one discourtesy that he used."

The shadow of a great sorrow settled down upon Astolat. No more the lily maid with light and joyous step flitted up and down the narrow turret stair. No more her laughter rang among the gray walls of the castle. High in her tower to the east she gazed upon the empty shield-case, while her sighs echoed the moanings of the wind outside. And in those days she made a little song — "The Song of Love and Death" she called it — and sang it there among the shadows all alone.

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! Let me die."

Launcelot and Elaine

Her clear voice, rising high on the last note, rang like a wild sweet cry throughout the castle, and her brothers, shuddering, said, "Hark, the phantom of the house that ever shrieks before a death!" For in those days there dwelt in each house a spirit that shrieked shrilly and fearfully whenever the death of a member of that household was nigh. The lord of Astolat and his two sons hastened to the east tower, and found Elaine already with the shadow of death in her eyes. Then was there great mourning among them.

Elaine gave a pale, little hand to each of her brothers and recalled to them their childhood: how they had often taken her on a barge far up the great river; how they would not pass beyond the cape with the poplar on it, though she cried to go on and find the palace of the King. And she told them that she had last night dreamed a

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dream in which she thought herself alone upon the tide, with the childish wish still in her heart; that she had waked to feel the longing again. And she begged them to let her go thence, beyond the poplar and far up the flood, that she might find rest at last in the palace of the King.

Then came a holy priest and ministered to her spirit; and when he had passed from thence, the maid besought Lavaine to write for her a letter to Sir Launcelot. Her sorrowing brother wrote as she bade him, and offered to bear the letter to the knight. But she answered:

“I myself must bear it.” While they marveled, she told them that when death should come to her, they must place the letter in her hand and send her up the flood, with only the dumb old serving-man to row her. She told them also how they should deck her body and the barge which was to bear

Launcelot and Elaine

her to the King; and her father, weeping, promised her. /

Ten sad mornings passed, and on the eleventh her father placed the letter in her hand and closed her fingers on it, and that day she died.

And they placed her on the barge, with the dumb old servitor, and sent her up the shining flood to find the palace of the King—even as they had promised.

Great was the wonder at the palace that day, when the black-draped barge stopped at the foot of the marble steps which led down to the water's edge. Fairer than anything they had dreamed of lay the beautiful dead. In her right hand was clasped a lily, and in her left, the letter to Sir Launcelot. The barge was draped in black from prow to stern; but the fair girl was covered with cloth of gold drawn to her waist, and decked with the shining glory of her golden hair.

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She did not seem as dead, but only fast asleep, and “lay as though she smiled.”

The guards of the palace and the people, gaping, stood around, and whispered, “What is it?” Then gazing on the silent boatman’s face, they said:

“He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she, look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen so fair!”

Then was there great trouble in their hearts; for it had been prophesied that the King would not die, but would pass into fairyland. And many feared that this was a fairy barge, come to bear their King away from them.

While thus they marveled, King Arthur and many of his knights came down to the water’s edge to see.

The dumb boatman stood up and pointed to the dead.

The King caused two of his purest knights to uplift the maiden and bear her into the

Launcelot and Elaine

palace. Then came they all to see her—and even Launcelot, whom she had loved.

King Arthur took the letter from her hand and read it aloud in all that company. It was the strange, sweet story of her love and death; and recounted how, because her knight had left her, taking no farewell, she had come thus to take her last farewell of him. The letter ended with an appeal to Launcelot to pray for her soul.

All eyes turned on Launcelot, many of them reprovingly. But the sorrowful knight lifted up his voice, and told them the whole sad story of the maiden's love for him, and why he had left her, bidding no farewell. When he had finished, no man blamed him more.

Then, by order of the King, they bore the lily maid to the richest shrine in all the realm, there to hold burial service over her. The King himself led the funeral train, and

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all the knights of the Table Round followed him, in martial order. And King Arthur caused a tomb to be opened for Elaine among the royal dead.

Then, "with gorgeous obsequies, and mass, and rolling music," as for a queen, they laid her golden head "low in the dust of half-forgotten kings." And Launcelot, sorrowing, cried:

"Farewell — now at last!"

THE HOLY GRAIL

THUS runs an ancient legend: When our blessed Saviour hung upon the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, one of his loving followers, brought a crystal bowl and caught the blood which fell from the Master's wounded side. This bowl, or cup, was the "Holy Grail," and was the same from which our Lord had drunk at the Last Supper with his disciples.

In the long, dark days of persecution which followed the passion of Christ, Joseph was driven out of the Holy Land, and took refuge in the desolate island of Britain. Here the heathen prince, "Aviragus," granted him a marshy spot in Glastonbury wherein to dwell.

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The day of miracles had not yet passed, and the good Joseph asked for a sign from God by which to know if here were a fitting place to found a church of the true faith. After much fasting and prayer, he planted his dry and hardened pilgrim staff in the ground one mid-winter night — and lo! on the morrow it was crowned with leaves and flowers, as a sign of how the faith of Christ would blossom in this barren, heathen land. And ever since that time the winter thorn blossoms at Christmas in memory of our Lord.

Now Joseph had brought the Holy Grail to Britain with him, and for many years the precious vessel remained on earth to bless mankind. So potent was it for good, that all who beheld or touched it were freed from whatsoever ills afflicted them.

However, the times grew evil, and the Holy Cup was snatched away to heaven; and for many weary decades of sin and

The Holy Grail.

suffering its healing powers were lost to the world.

In the time of King Arthur, when Arimathean Joseph had been sleeping under the winter thorn at Glastonbury for four hundred years, there awoke in the hearts of the people the hope that the holy vessel would return to earth to bless the high efforts of their great and good King.

Chiefest among those who longed for the return of the Grail, was the gentle sister of Sir Percivale, a pure and spotless maiden who had withdrawn from the world to the sheltering peace of a convent. This sweet-eyed nun had heard the story of the Holy Grail from the priest to whom she confessed her sins, and ever after spent her days in prayer that it might come again.

“O Father, might it come to me by prayer and fasting?” she had asked. And the priest had replied, “Nay, I know not.”

King Arthur and His Court

But after many days her heart's wish was granted. For one night as she lay sleeping in her narrow convent cell, she was wakened by a sound as of silver horns blown over the far distant hills. At first she thought of hunters; but as the mists of sleep cleared from her brain, she realized that no harp or horn or anything of mortal make could wake those heavenly sounds. As she lay thus, listening to the bugle call from Paradise, there streamed through her cell a cold and silver beam, adown whose radiance glided the Holy Grail, uncovered. Rose-red it shone, with a glory that was not of earth, and the white walls and all around crimsoned in reflection of its blessed light. Then the music faded, the vision passed, and the rosy quiverings died into the night.

On the morrow, the gentle nun spake to her brother Percivale, saying, "The Holy Thing is here again among us, brother; fast

The Holy Grail

thou too and pray, and tell thy brother knights to fast and pray, that so perchance the vision may be seen by thee and those, and all the world be healed."

Very great was the wonder in Camelot when Sir Percivale's sister told of her vision of the Holy Grail. Far and wide the news was spread, and there was much rejoicing that the blessed cup had come down again to the children of men.

Now there had recently come into King Arthur's court a bright boy-knight by the name of Galahad. He had been reared by the nuns in a convent hard by; but none knew whence he came, and many were the surmises concerning his origin.

Clad in white armor from top to toe, with locks of gold and a face of angel sweetness, Galahad moved among the Round Table knights, a spirit of faith and purity.

"God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"

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King Arthur had said when he made him knight; and the prayer was not in vain, for the flawless purity of Galahad's beautiful face was but the visible expression of a soul as fair.

Now it came to pass that when this nun beheld Sir Galahad, she cut off her shining locks and braided therefrom a strong sword-belt. And she bound it on him, saying, "Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen, and break thro' all, till one will crown thee king, far in the spiritual city." And the glorified light of her eyes passed into his soul, and he believed in her belief.

At the Round Table of King Arthur there was one seat which no man dared to occupy. "The Siege Perilous," Merlin had called it, when he fashioned it with strange inscription and device. Perilous — because none but the pure might sit therein in safety. Many, who had deemed themselves above reproach,



THE NUN AND GALAHAD

The Holy Grail

had come to grievous misfortune by attempting to occupy that "siege." The great Merlin himself had once dared its powers, and had been swallowed up for evermore.

But Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom, cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!" This came to pass on a summer night when a great banquet had been prepared in Arthur's hall, and the knights were assembled for feasting. The bold Sir Galahad took his seat in the Siege Perilous. The wondering company looked to see some dread judgment smite him down, and marveled much when no evil thing befell. Something wonderful did come to pass though — something so wonderful that all that knightly company were stricken dumb as they beheld. Scarcely had Sir Galahad taken seat, when there came a dreadful sound as if the roof above them were riven in pieces. A fearful blast swept down upon the castle, and awful

King Arthur and His Court

thunders boomed along the sky; and in that pealing was a cry which no man might interpret. Suddenly there streamed along the hall a beam of light "seven times more clear than day," and adown that clear beam moved the Holy Grail. Not as to the pious nun — clear and uncovered — did it come to these men of might. A luminous cloud veiled it from their eyes, and none might see who bore it.

While yet the vision lingered, each knight beheld his fellow's face as in a glory, and they arose from their seats, staring dumbly at each other.

When the Holy Thing passed from them and the light faded and the thunder ceased, they found their tongues again.

Sir Percivale was the first to lift up his voice; and he sware before them all that, because he had not seen the Grail uncovered, he would ride a twelvemonth and a day in



The Holy Grail

quest of it. Then knight by knight the others followed the example of Percivale, and took his vow upon themselves.

Now, by a sad mischance, King Arthur was not among his own when the vision of the veiled cup passed before them and they swore the solemn vow to ride a twelvemonth and a day until they saw the Grail, uncovered. He had journeyed to a remote part of his kingdom to right some wrong, and returned just in time to find the vision passed and his strangely excited knights in tumult — some vowing, some protesting. He spake to the nearest knight, saying, "Percivale, what is this?"

Then Percivale told him what had come to pass, and how the knights had vowed their vows because they wished to see the holy vessel, uncovered.

But the King exclaimed,

"Woe is me, my knights! Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow."

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Then the bold Sir Percivale —

“Had thyself been here, my King, *thou* wouldst have sworn!”

“Art thou so bold and has not seen the Grail?” replied King Arthur. Percivale answered him,

“Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light, but since I did not see the Holy Thing, I swear a vow to follow it till I saw.”

The King then asked them, knight by knight, if any had seen it; but all replied,

“Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows.”

“Lo, now,” said the King, “have ye seen a cloud? What go ye into the wilderness to see?”

Then on a sudden the clear voice of Galahad rang from the other end of the hall:

“I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail. I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—‘O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me!’ ”

The Holy Grail

“Ah, Galahad, Galahad,” said the King, “for such as thou art is the vision, not for these!” And he spake to his knights at length, and strove to show them how unfitted were such men for such a quest; how much more necessary it was for them to be in their places at his side—quick to see the evil everywhere and strong to strike it down—than abroad in the land, “following wandering fires.”

But he had ever taught his knights that “man’s word is God in man,” and he ended sadly, saying,

“Go, since your vows are sacred, being made.”

On the morrow the knights prepared them for their journeys, after holding a farewell tournament, in which Sir Percivale and Sir Galahad did many mighty deeds of arms.

Great was the mourning throughout Camelot when the people learned that their beloved

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protectors and champions were to be lost to them for many days. A great crowd gathered to see the knights depart; and Queen Guinevere cried aloud,

“This madness has come on us for our sins!” Alas, poor Queen! It was into her own heart that she looked; for she had not proved a loving wife to Arthur, nor a good queen to the land of Britain, nor a true woman in the sight of God.

Then he who had built up the high order of the Table Round—who had redeemed a broad kingdom from wild beasts and heathen hordes—who had struggled to revive in man the image of his Maker—sat in empty halls. Misfortune and sorrow and treason crept nearer and nearer to the blameless King, and his Round Table knights were abroad in the land, “following wandering fires.”

The Holy Grail

SIR BORS

“ . . . Sir Bors it was

Who spake so low and sadly at our board ;

And mighty reverent at our grace was he.”

Thus the poet describes the gentle cousin of Launcelot. Of all the Round Table knights, Sir Bors was the most quiet and the most unassuming. He too had sworn to follow the Holy Grail, but in such humbleness of spirit that he felt “if God would send the vision, well; if not, the Quest and he were in the hands of heaven.”

Now it chanced that Sir Bors rode to the “lonest tract of all the realm,” and found there among the crags a heathen people, whose temples were great circles of stone, and whose wise men, by their magic arts, could trace the wanderings of the stars in the heavens.

Much these strange people questioned Bors of his coming; and when he told them

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of the Quest, and talked boldly of a God they knew not, their priests became offended, and caused him to be seized and bound and cast into prison.

Now the cell into which he was cast was loosely fashioned of huge stones, but so massive were these rocks no human hand could move them.

All day long he lay in utter darkness, but when the silence of night came, one of the great stones slipped from its place, as if by miracle. Through the opening thus made, Bors could behold the sky above him as he lay bound on the floor. The seven clear stars of Arthur's Round Table looked down upon him "like the bright eyes of familiar friends," and exceeding peace fell upon his troubled spirit.

All at once, across the stars, a rosy color passed, and in it glowed the Holy Grail, uncovered! The vision faded; but its blessed

The Holy Grail

radiance lingered long in the heart of the man who lay bound to the rocks for the truth's sake.

In a little while a maiden, who, among her pagan kindred, held the true faith in secret, stole in and loosed the cords which bound him, and set him free.

SIR LAUNCELOT

Alas for the knight whom Arthur loved and honored most! Evil came to Launcelot, and he opened his once pure and loyal heart and let it in. Then came a long, dark struggle between his baser and his better self — a fight so evenly waged and so desperate, that a mighty madness would sometimes seem to possess him, and he would fly from the haunts of men, to return, wasted and gaunt with the struggle.

While thus in secret Launcelot harbored the sin that he both loved and hated, the

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knights took upon themselves the quest of the Holy Grail; and he sware with the others, in the hope that he might find the Holy Thing, and thus be healed of his grievous sin.

So he too went forth; but while he yearned and strove and suffered, his madness came upon him once again, and whipt him into waste fields far away, where he was beaten down by little men. Then he came in his shame and sorrow to a naked shore, where a fierce blast was blowing. He found there a blackened bark, anchored. He entered it and loosed the chains which fastened it, saying,

“I will embark and I will lose myself, and in the great sea wash away my sin.” Seven days the vessel drove along the stormy deep; but on the seventh night the wind fell, and the boat grated on a rocky coast.

Looking up, Launcelot beheld the enchanted towers of Castle Carbonek “like a



LAUNCELOT BEHOLDS THE TOWERS OF CASTLE CARBONEK

The Holy Grail

rock upon a rock" above him. He disembarked and entered the castle. Two great lions guarded the way, and made as though they would rend him in pieces, but a voice said to him,

"Doubt not, go forward!" And into the sounding hall he passed, unharmed. And always, as he moved about the lonely place, he heard, clear as a lark and high above, a sweet voice singing in the topmost tower. Then up and up the steps he climbed—and seemed to climb forever. But at length he reached a door: a light gleamed through the crannies, and he heard in heavenly voices sung,

"Glory and joy and honor to our Lord,
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail!"

Then in his mad longing, he flung himself against the door. It gave way, and for one instant he thought he saw the Holy Grail, veiled in red samite, with kneeling angels around.

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But a heat as from a seven times heated furnace smote him, and he swooned away.

When he returned to Camelot — he knew not how — he sadly told the King,

“What I saw was veiled and covered; this Quest was not for me.”

SIR PERCIVALE

In that last tournament which was held before the knights departed on the Quest, Percivale had done many doughty deeds of arms: so when he rode from Camelot, his hopes were high and his spirit was proud. “Never heaven appear’d so blue, nor earth so green”; for in his pride and strength he was sure that he would find the Holy Grail.

But as he rode, the King’s dark prophecy that most of them would follow wandering fires, came to him, again and again, and seemed to make the day less fair.

The Holy Grail

Then every evil word that he had spoken, and every evil thought that he had harbored, and every evil deed that he had done, rose up within him, crying,

“ This Quest is not for thee ! ”

On he rode, and diverse and strange were the adventures that befell him. For many a weary day he seemed to be mocked by the phantoms of a feverish dream. Hungry and thirsty, he pressed toward flowing streams beside which gorgeous apples grew ; but when he put the fruit to his lips, it withered and crumbled into dust. Homelike scenes appeared before his tired eyes, only to fall into dust as he approached. Then the vision of a great armored horseman, splendid as the sun, came riding down upon him and opened its arms as if to clasp him, but it too fell away to dust. Again he heard a voice calling to him,

“ Welcome, Percivale, thou mightiest and thou purest among men ! ” And, seeking

King Arthur and His Court

the voice, he rode on till he reached a splendid city on the summit of a great hill.

But when he gained the height, he found the city deserted, with but one man there — aged and poor — to welcome him. Alas! Even the old man — in greeting him — fell into dust and vanished from sight. Then Percivale cried in despair,

“Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself and touch it, it will crumble into dust!”

In his disappointment he rode down into a quiet vale, deep as the hill was high, and sought the advice of a holy man who dwelt in a hermitage hard by a little chapel. When the knight had told of all his distracting visions, the good man said,

“O son, thou hast not true humility, the highest virtue, mother of them all. Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself, as Galahad.”

The Holy Grail

SIR GALAHAD

Though his arm had been strongest in the farewell tournament, Galahad rode out of Camelot with his young heart fired by higher glories than his own. Purer joys than all earthly fame could give, were pulsing through his heart; a flutter of wings was in the air, and angel voices whispered,

“O just and faithful knight of God, ride on! The prize is near.”

And it was near. So near that through all his earthly wanderings it went before him like a guiding star, always visible to him. In Arthur's hall he had seen the Grail, uncovered. By night and day, on naked mountain-top or in the sleeping mere below, in blackened marsh or on crimson battle-field, the cup of God shone before his eyes.

God did make him good as he was beautiful; and by the almighty power of goodness

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he rode through all the land, shattering evil customs as he went. He passed through pagan realms and made them his; he clashed with heathen hordes and bore them down; he broke through all, and in the strength of faith, came forth victor.

Now it came to pass that while Percivale yet abode in the Vale of Humility, Galahad appeared before him in shining silver armor. The two made great joy of each other, and they and the old hermit went into the little chapel to kneel in prayer and partake of the Lord's Supper.

While they were yet kneeling, the Holy Grail came down upon the shrine, and the face of the Christ-child descended and disappeared into the sacred elements. But only Galahad's eyes were open to the vision.

Then he told them that his time was near at hand; that he would go thence, and



GALAHAD RIDES OUT OF CAMELOT

The Holy Grail

one would crown him king "far in the spiritual city." And he said to the saddened Percivale,

"Thou shalt see the vision when I go."

When the day began to wane, he and Percivale departed thence and climbed to the top of a high hill. A fierce storm arose, and lightnings lit and relit the shining armor of Galahad and fired the dead trunks of trees around. They passed on, and came at length to a great marsh which ran out into the yet greater sea. And behold! there appeared a seemingly endless bridge that stretched out, pier after pier, into eternity.

Then lo, a wondrous thing! Galahad leaped upon the bridge and sped along its shining length; and as he passed, span after span of the bridge sprang into fire behind him, so that the bold Sir Percivale, who fain would have followed, could only stand and behold. But glorious was the vision at

King Arthur and His Court

last vouchsafed to Percivale's aching eyes. Thrice above the head of Galahad "the heavens opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed shoutings of all the sons of God." His armor glistened like a silver star above the great sea, and the Grail, now all uncovered, hung like a burning jewel o'er his head.

Then far in the distance, somewhere, where sea and sky met, rose the spiritual city; and Galahad and the Holy Thing passed in together, to be seen no more of men.

Only a tithe of the searchers returned to Camelot — to a saddened King in a decaying city. Of those who did come back, the greater number had grown cold, and careless of the Quest.

The mightiest of King Arthur's knights had seen the Grail, but not unveiled, and scarce could say he saw; two of the truest

The Holy Grail

and bravest had beheld the holy cup in fleeting visions and from afar off; but Galahad had been crowned king, far in the spiritual city.

Verily, King Arthur knew his knights when he cried,

“Ah, Galahad, Galahad, for such as thou art is the vision, not for such as these!”

SIR GALAHAD

ALFRED TENNYSON

My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.
The shattering trumpet shrilleth high,
The hard brands shiver on the steel,
The splinter'd spear-shafts crack and fly,
The horse and rider reel;
They reel, they roll in clanging lists,
And when the tide of combat stands,
Perfume and flowers fall in showers,
That lightly rain from ladies' hands.

King Arthur and His Court

How sweet are looks that ladies bend
On whom their favors fall!
For them I battle till the end,
To save from shame and thrall:
But all my heart is drawn above,
My knees are bow'd in crypt and shrine:
I never felt the kiss of love,
Nor maiden's hand in mine.
More bounteous aspects on me beam,
Me mightier transports move and thrill;
So keep I fair thro' faith and prayer
A virgin heart in work and will.

When down the stormy crescent goes,
A light before me swims.
Between dark stems the forest glows,
I hear a noise of hymns:
Then by some secret shrine I ride;
I hear a voice, but none are there;
The stalls are void, the doors are wide,
The tapers burning fair.
Fair gleams the snowy altar cloth,
The silver vessels sparkle clean
The shrill bell rings, the censer swings,
And solemn chants resound between.



"THREE ANGELS BEAR THE HOLY GRAIL"

The Holy Grail

Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board: no helmsman steers:
I float till all is dark.
A gentle sound, an awful light!
Three angels bear the Holy Grail:
With folded feet, in stoles of white,
On sleeping wings they sail.
Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
My spirit beats her mortal bars,
As down dark tides the glory slides,
And star-like mingles with the stars.

When on my goodly charger borne
Thro' dreaming towns I go,
The cock crows ere the Christmas morn,
The streets are dumb with snow.
The tempest crackles on the leads,
And, ringing, springs from brand and mail;
But o'er the dark a glory spreads,
And gilds the driving hail.
I leave the plain, I climb the height;
No branchy thicket shelter yields;
But blessed forms in whistling storms
Fly o'er waste fens and windy fields.

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A maiden knight — to me is given
Such hope, I know not fear;
I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven
That often meet me here.
I muse on joy that will not cease,
Pure spaces clothed in living beams,
Pure lilies of eternal peace,
Whose odors haunt my dreams;
And, stricken by an angel's hand
This mortal armor that I wear,
This weight and size, this heart and eyes,
Are touch'd, are turn'd to finest air.

The clouds are broken in the sky,
And thro' the mountain-walls
A rolling organ-harmony
Swells up, and shakes and falls.
Then move the trees, the copses nod,
Wings flutter, voices hover clear:
"O just and faithful knight of God!
Ride on! the prize is near."
So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All-arm'd I ride, whate'er betide,
Until I find the Holy Grail.

GUINEVERE

THE King raised to knighthood others to fill the places left vacant by the Holy Quest, but the new knights were not the old; and even some of those who were first to take the vows fell away from their faith and their loyalty to the King.

Though King Arthur was a "selfless man and stainless gentleman," his character was a standard not too lofty for any man; yet there were those of his knights whose hearts were made of baser stuff, and who complained that the King expected too much of them, thus excusing to themselves their own shortcomings. Some grew quickly tired of the strict bonds in which the oath of knighthood held them; others waged long and bitter

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war with the evil in their own hearts, to fail at last; while a few — a very few — followed the King to the end, faithful even unto death.

Disaffection crept among them like a silent, dread disease, till Modred, Arthur's own nephew, turned traitor. Ambitious, keen-eyed, cruel, this Modred had long planned to make himself king in Arthur's stead, but had masked his disloyalty with a fawning smile, biding his time.

His opportunity for open revolt came with the failure of the Holy Quest; for many of the knights had come back discouraged, and many had turned away. These dissatisfied ones Modred succeeded in winning to himself, and he and they allied themselves with the heathen. Hordes of these enemies to the King had been steadily gathering in the North, while they who might have held them back were following wandering fires.

Guinevere

But the decay of Arthur's cherished Order, and the treachery of friends and kindred, were not the bitterest of the disappointments which came to the blameless King. The cruelest pang of all, and the one under which his great heart broke, was the faithlessness of Launcelot and Guinevere — the "knight whom Arthur loved and honored most," and the woman to whom he had given the whole of his mighty love — the two to each of whom he had declared,

"Let come what will, I trust thee to the death."

How it all came to pass is too sad a story to tell; but it is something to remember that poor Launcelot bitterly repented his disloyalty, and that when he met Arthur face to face in battle, he stayed his hand and would not strike the King. In after years, when Arthur had passed away, Launcelot spent his days in a monastery, praying that he

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might meet the King in "that better world that makes this right."

Guinevere had never loved the King. Hers was a soul incapable of understanding the height and purity of his, and she had early tired of his lofty ideals and come to look for companionship elsewhere. Not many years, and the whole kingdom was agog with tales of her vain and foolish behavior, and of how she did not love King Arthur.

Many are the sins which the old stories attribute to her, and all who tell the tale agree that it was through the folly and wickedness of the Queen that the Round Table knights were led away from their holy vows.

Modred, the traitor, hated Queen Guinevere and had long sought an opportunity to reveal her sins to the King; for Arthur alone, in all that land, trusted her faith and loved her still.



GUINEVERE TAKES REFUGE IN A CONVENT

Guinevere

Now when Modred and his heathen allies broke in open revolt against the King, Queen Guinevere knew that the hour of dreaded disclosure was at hand and, fearing the just wrath of her husband, she fled by night from his castle and took refuge in a convent many miles away.

Here, while the storm of battle was gathering, the Queen sat silent and wretched, and thought long upon the sins that had raised the fearful conflict. She seemed to read scorn and reproach in every innocent thing about her, and sorrow and remorse came and made their home in her breast. At last one sad day she heard the tramp of mailed feet and a cry "The King!" ring along the halls. Like one changed to stone she sat, until the familiar step was near at hand; then falling prone on the floor, she covered her face with her shadowy hair that she might not see the reproach of his sorrowful eyes.

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In a voice "monotonous and hollow like a ghost's" the King spoke to her. There was no trace of wrath in his tones, but his calm and awful sorrow was worse than reproach. He told her how her sins had spoiled the great purpose of his life, and that through her he was going to "that last dim battle in the West" to meet his doom, if prophecy had spoken truly.

"Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me that I, the King, should greatly care to live," she heard him say, and she crept a little nearer and clasped his feet. Then, gently still, he told her he had provided that she should be protected there; that he would leave to guard her some of his still faithful few, lest one hair of her head be harmed.

"Let no man dream but that I love thee still," he said. "And if thou purify thy soul, hereafter in that world where all are pure we two may meet before high God. Lo!

Guinevere

I forgive thee as Eternal God forgives.
Farewell."

With face still covered she heard his steps retire, but when he was gone, she stole to the casement and watched him ride away to meet his doom. Then suddenly stretching out her white arms to him she cried,

"O, Arthur! Gone, my lord? Gone through my sin to slay and to be slain!"

Who shall measure the despair of that heart which too late realizes that what it has lost is its all in all! Arthur had gone to his doom, and nothing was left to the poor Queen but the knowledge that she loved him, now when her love was of no avail. Never until that moment in which he forgave her grievous sins, did she know him for what he was — "the highest and most human too."

"We needs must love the highest when we see it," she told her aching heart — but Arthur was gone, and he did not know.

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Then in the keenness of her despair she remembered the one hope he had given her—that some day they might meet again; but she knew full well that that could never be until she had grown worthy of him.

So through the sad years which followed, she strove and worked and prayed, to shrive her soul of sin; and in the fullness of time she died, and passed into that better country to which ‘the love of the highest’ leads.

The Passing of Arthur

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

WHEN King Arthur had bidden farewell to the Queen at the Convent of Almesbury, he joined the main body of his faithful followers, and moved on towards the west to meet the traitor forces.

At the close of the first day's march, the Round Table knights halted and pitched their tents for a night's rest. While the army slept, the bold Sir Bedivere, "the first of all his knights knighted by Arthur at his crowning," moved quietly among the slumbering hosts, unable himself to rest; and as he slowly paced, he heard the restless moanings of the unhappy King:—

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,

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but in His ways with men I find Him not!" and again —

"Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die!"

At last, wearied out, King Arthur slept; and in his sleep there came to him the ghost of Gawain, lightly blown along the wind. As the frail phantom passed, it cried to him,

"Hail, King! To-morrow thou shalt pass away. Farewell! There is an isle of rest for thee, and I am blown along a wandering wind."

The King waked with a start, crying,

"Who spake? Thine, Gawain, was the voice!" And Sir Bedivere, being near, answered,

"My King, let pass whatever will, elves and the harmless glamour of the field, as yet *thou* shalt not pass"; and he entreated King Arthur to throw off the melancholy spirit that possessed him, saying that they were

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now hard upon the traitor Modred and the faithless knights.

“Arise, go forth, and conquer as of old,” he cried to his beloved lord.

But the King answered him, saying,

“Far other is this battle whereto we move, than when we strove in youth, and brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome. Ill doom is mine to war against my people and my knights. The king who fights his people fights himself. The stroke that strikes them dead is as my death to me.”

Then, though sorrowing deeply, the King arose and moved his hosts while yet it was night. He pushed the forces of Modred, league by league, back to the western boundary of Lyonesse. Here the long mountains ended in a coast of shifting sand, and beyond this was the ever restless sea.

The traitors were at last at bay: there on the waste sands by the sea-shore, the

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Round Table knights closed with them in that last "weird battle of the West."

As they fought, a death-white mist came down upon the sea and land, and confusion fell upon the struggling forces, so that no man beheld whom he smote.

"Friend and foe were shadows in the mist, and friend slew friend, not knowing whom he slew." Weird indeed was that last battle, and the hosts that waged it were as men possessed. Some, as they fought, were haunted by visions of golden youth, while others met the faces of old ghosts upon the battlefield.

All the long day the swaying forces struggled, and many were the base deeds done, and many the knightly ones. When evening descended, a dread hush fell upon the scene of battle, and a bitter wind came out of the north and lifted the mist from the field of conflict.

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And lo! the scene of blood was seemingly deserted, save by the wounded, the dying, and the dead, and by King Arthur and one faithful knight. Sir Bedivere was with him still — Sir Bedivere, the first at Arthur's feet for knighthood, and the last at his side in battle in fulfillment of his vows.

When the King beheld his loyal follower, he cried to him,

“O Bedivere, — on my heart hath fallen confusion, till I know not what I am, nor whence I am, nor whether I be king. Behold, I seem but king among the dead.” And the bold Sir Bedivere answered,

“If the dead have kings, there also will I worship thee. But still thy life is whole, and still I live who love thee.” Then he pointed King Arthur to where, among the dead and dying, the traitor Modred stood, unharmed. At sight of his false kinsman and bitter foe,

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the King was stirred by a mighty wrath, and grasping Excalibur, he cried to his faithful knight,

“King am I, whatsoever be their cry; and one last act of kinghood shalt thou see yet, ere I pass.” So saying, like a lion roused, he rushed upon the traitor.

Modred had seen and was ready for the coming shock; and he dealt Arthur several grievous wounds upon the head. But with one last and mighty stroke of Excalibur the King laid the rebel dead at his feet, then himself fell fainting from the wounds he had received. Then was the good Sir Bedivere sore troubled. He lifted the wounded King tenderly, and bare him to a chapel hard by the field of battle. There in the moonlight, at the foot of a broken cross, he gently laid him down and ministered unto him. At length Arthur, opening his blue eyes, said,

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“The sequel of to-day unsolders all the goodliest fellowship of famous knights whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep they sleep—the men I loved—” and a little later still he whispered, “I perish by this people which I made.”

Then summoning his strength with an effort, he talked to the sorrowful Bedivere at length. He reminded his faithful knight of Merlin’s prophecy, which said that the King would not die but would pass away to come again. He gazed at his good sword Excalibur and minded him of the words of the seer, spoken to his restless youth:

“Take thou and strike; the time to cast away is yet far off.” He *had* taken and had stricken well,—not one stroke for his own glory, but all for the glory of his Master, Christ. But the time to cast away was now at hand; and knowing this, he told Sir Bedivere,

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“Thou take my brand, Excalibur, and fling him far into the middle mere: watch what thou seest and lightly bring me word.”

Then Sir Bedivere answered him, saying,

“It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus, aidless, alone; yet I thy hest will all perform at full, watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.”

With this promise on his lips, Sir Bedivere took Excalibur and bare it as he was bidden to the side of the lake; but as he paused by the margin, the full moonlight fell upon the jeweled hilt, causing its gems to sparkle with a thousand dyes. The old knight gazed long and wistfully at the jewels, till their brilliance dazzled his eyes and dulled his purpose. He could not bring himself to throw away such wealth; so he bethought him that he would conceal the brand among the many-knotted water-flags, and bear a false report to the King.

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“Hast thou performed my mission which I gave? What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard?” the King asked of him when he returned. And the knight replied,

“I heard the ripple washing in the reeds, and the wild water lapping on the crag.” King Arthur, pale and faint, exclaimed,

“Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name, not rendering true answer like a noble knight. Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again, and do the thing I bade thee.”

Then went the knight a second time to the side of the mere, but temptation came again into his heart. This time it was not the lust of wealth that stayed his hand from flinging Excalibur. He minded him of the great King now about to pass away, and of all the mighty deeds of arms of the Round Table knights; and he felt that relics of the noble Arthur would be an inspiration to men in coming ages. He fondly pictured to him-

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self how the mighty brand, if he preserved it, would hang in some treasure-house in after times, and how men would wondering, say,

“King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur, wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.”

“The King is sick and knows not what he does,” he said to excuse himself; so he hid the blade a second time, and strode slowly back to the wounded King. Then Arthur spake:

“What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?” And Sir Bedivere answered,

“I heard the water lapping on the crag, and the long ripple washing in the reeds.” Hearing this the King was wroth indeed, and his eyes flashed with their wonted fire as he cried,

“Ah miserable and unkind, untrue, un-knightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me! Authority forgets a dying king!”

In his deep anger he accused Sir Bedivere of wishing to keep the sword for the

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sake of its precious hilt. Then softening a little, he said to the knight that a man might fail in duty twice, and the third time prove faithful.

“Get thee hence,” he cried, his eyes kindling again, “but, if thou spare to fling Excalibur, I will arise and slay thee with my hands.”

Then Sir Bedivere arose quickly and ran leaping down the rocks to the water’s edge. He snatched Excalibur from where it lay among the rushes, and shutting his eyes that he might not again be tempted, he wheeled it and threw it far into the middle mere.

And lo! as the brand left his hand, it flashed through the air like a streamer of light from the great Aurora of the North. But ere it dipped the wave in falling, a mighty arm rose out of the bosom of the lake, clothed in white samite — mystic, wonderful, — grasped the blade by the hilt,

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brandished it three times, and drew it under in the mere.

Then went Sir Bedivere back and told the King the mighty wonders he had seen. King Arthur heard and believed, and he said to the knight,

“My end draws nigh; ’t is time that I were gone. Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight, and bear me to the margin.” His strength was fast failing, but he half raised himself from the pavement, that the old knight might the better clasp him.

When Sir Bedivere looked into the wistful blue eyes, his own filled with remorseful tears; and he knelt down and received the weight of his master, and bore him tenderly from the place of tombs. Down the long rocky coast he strode with his burden, and ever and anon King Arthur whispered,

“Quick, quick, I fear it is too late!”

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At last they reached the lake-side. The winter moon shone out in full glory, and they beheld, far in the silvery distance, a dusky barge heaving toward them. As it nearer came, they saw that it was "dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern," and that its decks were crowded with stately forms, "black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream."

Nearer still it came; and lo! among its spectre band were the three fair queens who ever came to Arthur at his need. The vessel touched the shore and the King said, "Place me in the barge."

Wondering, the bold Sir Bedivere did as he was bid, and the three fair queens put forth their hands and received the wounded King. Then the tallest and fairest of the three took his head in her lap and unbound his casque. They chafed his hands and called him by his name, and they wept and bathed his white face with bitter tears.

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“So like a shattered column lay the King ;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.”

The barge put off from shore, and the heart-broken Bedivere cried to his departing lord,

“Ah! my lord Arthur, whither shall I go? Now I see the true old times are dead, when every morning brought a noble chance, and every chance brought out a noble knight.” Arthur answered slowly from the barge,

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills Himself in many ways.” And he told his sorrowing knight that he was going on a long journey to the happy island of Avilion, where falls not hail nor rain nor snow, nor ever wind blows loudly — where, among deep meadows and



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SIR BEDIVERE THROWS EXCALIBUR INTO THE MERE

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fair orchard lawns, he would be healed of his grievous wound.

Then the barge moved off into the night, leaving the sad Sir Bedivere to follow its course with aching eyes. Long he stood there, revolving in his mind memories of the dead past; till at last the east began to lighten and the barge became but a speck against the rim of coming dawn.

“The King is gone!” he groaned. But hark! Across the waters from the utmost east there came sounds “as if some fair city were one voice around a king returning from his wars.” And straining his eyes yet farther, Sir Bedivere watched the lessening speck till it vanished into light, to cast anchor on the shining shore of Avilion.

Thus Arthur passed away from the scenes of earth—to come again in the hearts of happier men in better times; for there’s never a triumph of right over wrong-doing, never

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an act of gentleness or courtesy or manly daring, but in itself fulfills something of the great King's prophecy:

“ I pass, but shall not die ! ”

“ ‘ Arthur is come again ; he cannot die . ’ ”

Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated — ‘ Come again, and thrice as fair ’ ;
And, further inland, voices echoed — ‘ Come,
With all good things, and war shall be no more . ’
At this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn . ”

